




Speech By
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QUEENSLAND CIVIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (JUSTICES OF THE PEACE) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.18 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013. I would like to thank the Attorney-General for bringing this bill forward. This is another way that we will simplify things and make the lives of Queenslanders easier.

Unfortunately, in today's world disputes arise between individuals. As those disputes arise there needs to be a sensible mechanism for dealing with those disputes. They have found themselves getting caught up in a legal system that requires long waits and has become choked up with so many applications. To come up with a system that will deal with the simpler and less complicated matters in a quick and efficient way is very useful.

It is always important for matters to be satisfactorily resolved, but I think it is also important that the resolution of those matters is done in a timely way. I think having two JPs—one legally qualified and being able to sit on a QCAT tribunal—will be able to facilitate matters being heard quickly and efficiently. I think the Attorney-General has done a good job in bringing this innovation forward.

I thank the committee and the secretariat as always who do a lot of work in preparing the report. We had several submissions on the bill. Some of those submissions were quite complimentary of the concept. I wish to read briefly part of the REIQ's submission. They were strongly supportive of the bill. They state—

We anticipate that the proposed amendments would considerably reduce these time delays provided that a sufficient number of JPs are appointed and jurisdictional limitations are reasonable ...

I think the Attorney-General has done a good job in making sure that we have both enough people for this trial to go forward and the relevant jurisdictional ability.

In Toowoomba, and Toowoomba North in particular, we have a considerable number of JPs. One of my office staff is often signing and witnessing documents and is a fully qualified JP. At the shopping centre immediately over the road from the office on several occasions throughout the week there are JPs providing a very valuable community service. So I would certainly like to thank all of the JPs in Toowoomba for all the time, energy and effort they put in to ensuring that the community has this very valuable service available to it.

In particular, I recall last year that I had the great pleasure of presenting to Floris Wilson a certificate for her 50 years of service. It was interesting to talk to Floris, after 50 years of being a justice of the peace, about different things that she had done. She had seen many changes made to the role of justice of the peace. Certainly when she began in her role 50 years ago—51 years ago now—the world was quite a different place. It was unusual for a lady, particularly a young married lady, to be a justice of the peace. So I had great pleasure in talking to her and catching up with her and hearing about some of her experiences.

But what was most interesting was how the role of justice of the peace had evolved and changed over time in Queensland. I think the Attorney-General should be congratulated on bringing this further evolution forward and making sure that justices of the peace are able to have opportunities to expand their knowledge, not only opportunities to be able to represent their community and provide a very valuable service but also opportunities for themselves to learn. Certainly I think there will be some young university students as well as maybe some older members of the community who will take up these opportunities.

I might just express a small disappointment that the trial is not available in Toowoomba. The trial will be in Brisbane, Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore and Townsville—all good and worthy locations. As Toowoomba is a regional centre I would have liked to have seen the trial there. I would encourage the government, upon taking the learnings from this trial and implementing a more permanent program, to give Toowoomba that opportunity.

I think the amount of \$5,000 is a very sensible amount. Whilst it is very significant, you would not expect people to begin legal proceedings if it were not a significant amount of money. However, I think it also has a sensible cap on it such that if it became a more complicated matter and a more difficult matter the judiciary would then take over hearing the matter. I think the \$5,000 limit is a sensible suggestion. Certainly I think this goes a long way to continuing the great tradition of citizens participating in the provision of justice in our community. It is certainly something that has happened for many, many years. It was spoken about earlier how justices of the peace began under King Richard and then were further institutionalised in the 14th century under King Charles. The member for Bundamba joked and laughed about these traditions. Yet here we stand in this great place where we get to make legislation to ensure that people can conduct their lives in a sensible and just manner. Every day in this place we bring legislation forward using a very traditional methodology, a tried and proven methodology. So for the member for Bundamba to be critical of a system simply because it has grown out of the Westminster system is disappointing to hear.

The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013 has been well put together and will certainly serve the people of regional Queensland well when the trial has been completed. In some of the small towns in Western Queensland and certainly in places west of the Great Dividing Range, one of the questions we need to ask is: is it too much trouble to go and pursue your legal rights? Is it too difficult? How easy is justice to access? I think sometimes people who live in centres such as Toowoomba, but certainly who live in centres such as Brisbane, might forget how difficult it is to actually get everything together and make an appearance at a tribunal. Ensuring that we have a mechanism to be able to hold these tribunals in regional and more remote locations I think will be very worthy. Having a system where we can do that effectively and efficiently will serve Queensland well. I look forward to the Attorney-General taking the learnings from this trial and implementing them in regional Queensland.

I was interested to know the sorts of disputes that will be heard. Matters involving minor debts, obviously, will come up from time to time. People deserve a place to be able to have their quarrels heard in a timely and effective manner, as I mentioned earlier. Tree disputes will be another. Toowoomba is a beautiful place with great tree avenues everywhere. Lots of people plant trees. My neighbour has certainly planted a very large leopard gum in front of my view, and I look forward to watching it grow! Whilst it is not on the dividing fence, it is certainly a cause, as my view disappears, of some discomfort for me. But certainly if your neighbour has a tree that is leaning over the fence, you need a suitable place to take that dispute. We do not want people spending lots of money and travelling big distances to deal with these disputes. Having an opportunity to have those disputes heard in a sensible, practical forum such as before two JPs—one legally qualified and one either gaining experience or potentially using their experience—and to have those disputes heard in a sensible time frame is very, very important and something that the Attorney-General should be proud of bringing into this place.

In conclusion, I would like to make sure that all of the JPs in Toowoomba North know that their services are valued by all of the members in this House but in particular by the member for Toowoomba North, myself. I would also like to make sure that Floris, who has spent many years serving the community, is thanked again. I certainly thank the Attorney-General for providing the certificate and for the opportunity to present that to her, because people who volunteer in our community deserve to be recognised. I think the program we have of justices of the peace recognises that, and I think it is fantastic that we now have a further opportunity to have them use their skills for the betterment of the local community. I commend the bill to the House.